

Sunday, July 19, 2020
Hiram & Mantua Center Christian Churches
Remote Worship Order

Order of Worship

Sunday Zoom WELCOME - Chad

Welcome to Hiram Christian and Mantua Center Christian Church's online service.

- Logistics
 - Bulletin
 - Communion
 - Rev. Chris McCreight is on Vacation. Keep his family in your prayers
 - Pre-Recorded to Live
 - Prelude - "You Go to Your Church" by CenterPeace
- Announcements
 - Our Anti-Racism Study is continuing on Wednesdays.
 - Camp Christian Otter Camp is this week
- Fellowship Time after the service to reflect and respond to the sermon and continue the discussion.
- Let's begin...

PRE-RECORDED PART

PRELUDE

"You Go to Your Church"

CenterPeace

WELCOME & CALL to Worship - Chad

Good Morning Church! This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Welcome to the Hiram and Mantua Center Christian Churches. We are worshipping together to grow in our faith, strengthen our common bonds, and be God's people in this time and place.

Rev. Chris McCreight is on vacation this week and today we will be hearing a message of hope from our seminary student and student pastor, Sarah Smith. Many of us would love to hit the fast-forward through all of this time, yet in this season how do we still live and grow and hope? We will explore that today through scripture, music, prayer, and preaching.

So together let's take a deep breath. Breathe in God's Grace and Peace...breathe

out those burdens and worries we are carrying...and let's focus this time and space together for worship.

Here in this Place by Thom Shuman

Here, in this place,

God welcomes all the dreamers, as well as the doubters:

here, the worriers and wanderers can call on God by name.

Here, in this time, we can remember all the ways God has graced us:

here, in these moments, we are reminded that God is with us, always!

Here are gathered those daring enough to step out of comfort into the unknown:

here, in this faith space, we will find the courage to cry out, 'God, save us!'

in every situation.

OPENING PRAYER - Chad

Gracious God, in this time of worship, help us so to hear your holy word that we truly listen and understand. That in our listening and understanding we might have faith. And in our faith, we might be the people you have called us to be and live into the way of Jesus Christ. Amen.

HYMN "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing"

SCRIPTURE & SERMON - Sarah

Romans 8:12-25

So then, beloved ones, the flesh has no claims on us at all, and we have no further obligation to live in obedience to it. For when you live controlled by the flesh, you are about to die. But if the life of the Spirit puts to death the corrupt ways of the flesh, we then taste her abundant life.

The mature children of God are those who are moved by the impulses of the Holy Spirit. And you did not receive the "spirit of religious duty," leading you back into the fear of never being good enough. But you have received the "Spirit of full acceptance," enfolding you into the family of God. And you will never feel orphaned, for as she rises up within us, our spirits join her in saying the words of tender affection, "Beloved Mother!" For the Holy Spirit makes God's parenthood real to us as she whispers into our innermost being, "You are God's beloved child!"

And since we are her consecrated children, we qualify to share all her treasures, for indeed, we are heirs of God himself. And since we are joined to Christ, we

also inherit all that he is and all that he has. We will experience being co-glorified with him provided that we accept his sufferings as our own.

I am convinced that any suffering we endure is less than nothing compared to the magnitude of glory that is about to be unveiled within us. The entire universe is standing on tiptoe, yearning to see the unveiling of God's glorious children! For against its will the universe itself has had to endure the empty chaos resulting from the consequences of human sin. But now, with eager expectation, all creation longs for freedom from its slavery to decay and to experience with us the wonderful freedom coming to God's children. To this day we are aware of the universal agony and groaning of creation, as if it were in the contractions of labor for childbirth. And it's not just creation. We who have already experienced the firstfruits of the Spirit also inwardly groan as we passionately long to experience our full status as God's children—including our physical bodies being transformed. For this is the hope of our salvation.

But hope means that we must trust and wait for what is still unseen. For why would we need to hope for something we already have? So because our hope is set on what is yet to be seen, we patiently keep on waiting for its fulfillment.

The word of God for God's people. May the hearing of the word open our hearts and minds to the wisdom of God in this service and beyond.

In an effort to organize the chaos that is my home after being cooped up for months on end, I finally tackled the most chaotic room in the house for me - my office. I have spent time glued to my chair to teach this spring, eating at my desk so I do not miss an email, connecting with others through video chat and social medias, doing church work and seminary. And in doing all that, space manages to get cluttered. The problem with cleaning my office is that it is where all of my books live, and not long after I start sorting them out to re-file, I start reading. One of my favorite shelves is the fiction shelf, as I am an avid reader of sci-fi and fantasy novels.

One of the books that most speaks to me from a fantasy perspective is "The Hobbit". I read it when I was a younger teen and thought it was alright as far as books go, but finding it on my shelf made me nostalgic, and I flipped back through it. Bilbo Baggins, the main character, is a respectable Hobbit who lives a good and sheltered life until Gandalf, a sneaky wizard promises Bilbo's aid to a group of dwarves who are seeking to reclaim treasure stolen from them by a horrible dragon Smaug. Bilbo begrudgingly agrees to go, and along the way outwits other magical groups in order to help the dwarves get to their gold, learning about his own value. One of the climaxes of the story is when the

dwarves refuse to share gold with those who aided them on their journey, so Bilbo switches sides to help the dwarves see reason. When his adventure comes to a close, Bilbo returns to his comfortable home. Except, now he has had a taste of adventure and made new friends and seen a new way of life. He knows that there is more to life out there than what is continued in his comfortable little shire, so his goals and experiences have broadened into something new. His home is the same, but his expectations of normalcy have shifted.

Many books follow a formula that is similar to this. A character is pushed out of their comfort zone, they realize that the world is much bigger than themselves, they tackle their own insecurities and fears, and they work towards whatever goal they had in the beginning. Except, that goal isn't always what they thought it was going to be. Bilbo only signed up to help the Dwarves. His hope was to get the job done and then go back to his comfortable normal life. Except, when he finally reached his goal, after suffering through that messy middle of self discovery, he realized that his job wasn't done. His world had expanded, as had his sense of self and righteousness. He had to help others in need. The hope for normal now encompassed more than just his idea of what normal should be.

The book of Romans, also placed right after the Acts in the New Testament canon was actually one of the later letters written by Paul to the church of Rome and has the longest consistent running argument out of any of his letters. In it, he is asking the church of Rome to live a Godly life that would set them aside from their non-faithful peers. He starts this verse with a call to recognizing their holy familial ties. They, like us today, have been adopted into the loving family of God through the gift of the Holy Spirit that guides their actions and their journey. The comforts at our homes, the comfort of the flesh, might be tempting, but the Holy Spirit has other plans for God's people.

The catch, and yes, we know there's always a catch, is that we are never promised a smooth, easy journey in which we will not suffer. Paul doesn't try to sugar coat it for the Romans: he knows that they are suffering. But! And it's a big one, he knows that they and we and he are destined for something greater. The Holy Spirit guides our journey, but trusts us to have the strength and wherewithal to make it through the suffering in order to see glory.

Paul then gets into what could be the start of a beautiful fantasy novel: The world stands on tiptoe to see what the children of God will do when pitted against suffering. Will they grow within it to face the chaos headon OR will they forget their destiny, forget their hope, become lost in the present moment's sufferings? Paul then brings us out of fantasy into a more recognizable real

world occurrence: that the world and ourselves are in the pangs of labor, the agony and groaning of creation.

As a person capable of giving birth, this creates a vivid image to me. We sure do love babies, but we always gloss over that middle part where it gets messy and painful and scary and REAL to imply that new life after the pains of labor makes the entire experience, for better or worse, worthwhile. And while I am not a parent, I am sure that parents would agree that childbirth might be the end of the pregnancy chapter, but it is only one chapter in a much larger story about the mosaics of our experiences.

What Paul is telling the church and the message for us here today is that we might be trapped in the messy middle, in the suffering and agony of creation. This middle could be big things like grief and loss during a pandemic. We have seen beloved family members, literal and as our metaphorical siblings in Christ, pass on due to grief, sickness, violence, and disease. We have given up our sense of societal normalcy in order to tackle the systemic problems that have been illuminated by the pandemic. We also face smaller, more individualized battles everyday. We fight loneliness and loss of connection. We grapple with mental health and shifts in routine and support systems. We brave spaces that no longer fit us: homes and churches that are affirming and a society based on capitalistic greed, in order to survive long enough to seek out the communities and spaces that will lovingly welcome us back when it is safe to do so. Each of these is a chapter in our story.

In the suffering and the thick of it, we forget about the promise of glory, of beauty being bestowed upon us that we can hope for as we grow and learn and adapt and stretch into a new version of ourselves.

What if instead, in looking at the stories that make up the Hobbit, we remember that it would be short and boring if Bilbo never took that first step out of the shire. He would have never known what he was capable of achieving, that he was destined for greatness if he had stayed or held on to the comforts of his previous normal. He would not have needed hope in the same way that he was hoping when fighting the spiders in the forest or coming up with riddles with Gollum. He would have been a fundamentally different character after more than 200 pages if it had only been about him living a comfortable and safe life.

Our stories too would be short and unfulfilling if we were only ever comfortable and safe. As we press ahead into a new normal surrounded by the suffering and uncertainty of becoming, whether your battle is personal, private, systemic, one

of identity, or any of the other trials we face, I hope you will listen for the Holy Spirit to call you to glory. May our hope change and shift and grow along with our spirits. May we always hope for a future that is beyond our wildest imaginings. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC - "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" Emliss Ricks

Video Ends, ZOOM Live Begins

Zoom TRANSITION

Chad: *May God add blessing to the hearing of the word in music. Thank you Emliss. Now, as we turn over to the live parts of the service we want to invite the children to get ready for the Children's Moment.*

CHILDREN'S MOMENT - Ally Hurd (Recording), Chad Delaney (Live on Zoom)

Anyone else have a dog? I'm going to show you a picture of my dog--Macy--about to get a treat. I'm holding the treat up...what do you think the dog is doing?

(Show picture)

Did that surprise you? It surprised me! Usually Macy is wagging her tail, jumping around, rolling over, trying to shake my hand, wild look in her eye. But that day she was so patient.

What does patient mean?

When is it hard to be patient?

- Waiting for something
- Going on a long car ride
- When our siblings are learning how to do something
- When you're hungry
- Waiting for Christmas

"But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

Ephesians 4:2 says, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

Sometimes it's hard to wait. Hard to wait our turn. Hard to wait for something to be over. Hard to wait until something starts. But it is a loving thing to do to be patient and keep moving forward. We also might remember that God is Always with us as we Wait. God is always there right beside us.

Let's Pray: *Dear God, help us to be more loving and patient with each other. With ourselves. Help us to always remember that you are with us when we are waiting. In Jesus Name we pray, Amen.*

COMMUNAL PRAYER - Sarah

DOXOLOGY

HOLY COMMUNION

Communion Hymn - "Lo, I am with you"

Meditation - Doug Rice

Communal Prayer & the Lord's Prayer - Doug Rice

Words of Institution - Doug

Sharing Communion Together

BENEDICTION - Sarah

We thank you for being in community in this space with us today! Please continue to join us this week for zoom meetings and book studies and prayer groups galore. If you are new to Hiram Christian Church or Mantua Center Christian Church, don't forget to check out our websites to see how you can get involved with and support either or both of the churches. To close us out today, I have adapted a poem titled "The Road Goes Ever On" from the Lord of the Rings by J.R.R Tolkien and an Irish prayer into one.

The Road goes ever on and on,
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.

May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face;
the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of Her hand. Amen.

HYMN - O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing

POSTLUDE - A Mighty Fortress is our God

Adam Petrosino